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TAGS: [PREL](#) [SY](#) [JA](#)

SUBJECT: JAPANESE AMBASSADOR CLAIMS INFLUENCE OVER SARG

Classified By: CDA Maura Connelly, American Embassy Damascus,
Reasons 1.4 b and d.

¶1. (C) Japanese Ambassador Matsaki Kunieda told Charge during her September 17 courtesy call that he believed that he had twice been able to influence SARG decision-making on issues of concern to the West. Kunieda said he had suggested to MFA Vice Foreign Minister Faisal Miqdad in early 2007 that the SARG's arguments that it had substantially improved security along the border with Iraq could be reinforced if the SARG organized a trip for ambassadors resident in Damascus to view the border arrangements. Kunieda was gratified when the MFA seemed to act on his advice and, in the event, Kunieda said the visit had been very instructive. He had asked the Syrian border guards about their ability to monitor movements across the border at night and was "dismayed" to learn from them that Western suppliers had refused to sell the SARG night vision goggles. Kunieda felt his efforts had been vindicated when MNF-I, he said, announced shortly thereafter that Syria's border controls were "robust."

¶2. (C) On the second occasion, after the September 6, 2007 bombing of the Al-Kibar facility, Kunieda informed Miqdad that the SARG's denial of nuclear activities there was insufficient. He suggested to Miqdad, he said, that the SARG should open the site to inspection by the IAEA. Kunieda claimed that shortly after he made the suggestion, the SARG announced it would accept an IAEA inspection team. Kunieda commented that he was "not convinced" by the USG's evidence that Al-Kibar was a nuclear processing facility and he thought requests for a subsequent IAEA visit were pushing the SARG "too far."

¶3. (C) Comment: Within the diplomatic community and among his own staff Kunieda is reputed to be difficult and prickly. He is deeply aggrieved by a perceived lapse in diplomatic practice in Embassy Damascus's notification to the local diplomatic corps of the previous Charge's departure and the current Charge's arrival. But his chagrin over protocol is also fueled by an antipathy to U.S. policy, ranging from Vietnam to Iraq --to which he readily admits, at tedious length -- that may also hamper his ability to objectively analyze the SARG's behavior. None of his diplomatic counterparts would claim to have such influence over SARG decision-making; rather it is likely that, because of Japan's development assistance and business interests here, the SARG allows him to believe they are responding to his guidance. His claims to having influenced SARG behavior were made during a monologue in which he catalogued what he viewed as U.S. foreign policy failures that was only interrupted by Charge's abrupt departure. We do not plan to maintain contact with him and we question whether MFA Tokyo is receiving reliable information from their embassy in Damascus.
CONNELLY